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Congress of the United States
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March 16, 2006

Ms. Marion Blakey
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Administrator Blakey:

I am writing on behalf of the residents of Pennsylvania's Seventh Congressional District regarding operations at Philadelphia International Airport and the recently released Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the proposed New York/New Jersey/Philadelphia Metropolitan Area Airspace Redesign currently under consideration.

I have serious concerns for my constituents whose lives are disrupted daily by aircraft noise and the potential environmental impact of increased air traffic. I also continue to be concerned that my District and the greater southeastern Pennsylvania region are being overlooked in this process. There are a variety of issues facing neighborhoods below the airspace in the study area, and I find it remarkable that the Federal Aviation Administration has scheduled only two public meetings proximate to Philadelphia International Airport, now the world's ninth busiest airport according to an industry study, in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Since the FAA and Philadelphia International Airport began discussing the Capacity Enhancement Program (CEP), the Airspace Redesign, and modifications to runway 17-35, my office has received numerous questions and concerns about current airport operations and plans for its future. Those concerns are forwarded to the appropriate local FAA office; however, public meetings offer my constituents the only opportunity to interact with FAA officials not only about future plans for the airport, but significant concerns about existing operations.

As a Congressman, I have valued greatly any opportunity to provide my constituents access to the federal agencies responsible for administering programs on their behalf. I am, therefore, concerned that I was not consulted more closely with regard to selecting locations for the upcoming Airspace Redesign public meetings. This lack of communication continues a pattern established at the outset of the CEP process and furthered with regard to my efforts to extend the Runway 17-35 comment period.

The FAA is responsible for administering safe and effective air travel, but that charter is not without the responsibility to the towns above which planes fly. In authorizing federal agencies to execute policies on behalf of the government, the Congress cedes administration of those activities, but we do so with the expectation that they will be performed in the best interest of the citizens, not merely the interest the federal agency represents. Providing greater representation to affected residents will allay fears that the results of the Draft EIS means the end project is a fait accompli.

I am unsatisfied that the current meeting schedule will enable my constituents to become better informed on the project and sufficiently provide their input. That only one meeting has been scheduled in my District, where roughly 2/3 of Philadelphia International Airport's footprint is located, is unacceptable when 11 meetings have been scheduled for New York and 13 are scheduled for New Jersey. In New York, 10 of 11 meetings are being held within 35 miles of either JFK or LaGuardia airports; in New Jersey, 10 out of 13 meetings are within 40 miles of Newark International. In Pennsylvania, two meetings are planned for the entire state. If it is appropriate to cluster 24 meetings in the northern portion of the NY/NJ/PHL Airspace, I am confident the FAA can see that additional meetings are held to give a voice to more residents in my District and southeastern Pennsylvania.

In addition to the March 30, 2006 meeting scheduled for Folsom, Ridley Township, I am asking that a public meeting be held in Tinicum Township at the request of officials there. More than any other municipality, Tinicum's residents face the greatest impact due to airport operations. In just over four years, they have been asked to absorb three major, potential changes to the airport, and, moreover, 400 homeowners continue to await long-promised sound proofing. In response to many comments I have received from residents in the western part of my District, I am also seeking a meeting in western Delaware County or Chester County to give my constituents there a voice as well. I will make my staff available to help locate a venue and announce these additional meetings.

The proposed airspace redesign has the potential to make air travel in and around the mid-Atlantic region more efficient and safe - I am hopeful it can achieve these goals with little or no negative impact on the communities in the region. The comments you receive will be an important barometer to determine whether the proposal

successfully balances those competing interests. I am grateful that you have made your staff available to meet with my residents, and I trust you can accommodate my request for additional meetings. Thank you for your prompt attention to this request; I look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Sincerely,

CURT WELDON
Member of Congress

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